

Softer demand for hard cash cuts coin output

By Roger Boye

U.S. coin production dropped significantly last year, the result of reduced demand for "hard money" from banks and businesses.

The federal mints churned out 14.7 billion coins for circulation during 1985, the smallest amount since 1979's 13.5 billion, according to government statistics. By comparison, 1984 production totaled 17.8 billion pieces.

Lincoln cents accounted for much of the decline, with 10.9 billion struck for circulation during 1985, down from 13.7 billion in the previous year. Experts have suggested that the drop in coinage demand may be due in part to the increased use of credit cards and to the conversion in 1982 to copper-plated zinc cents, which may have reduced the hoarding of Lincoln "pennies."

Coins dated 1985 have a face value of \$637 million or about \$2.75 worth of new change for each U.S. citizen.

Meanwhile, mint technicians have sharpened designs on the 1986-dated dies used to make cents, dimes and quarters. Among other things, Abe Lincoln's bow tie on the penny and the words "In God We Trust" on the dime will look more distinctive this year.

● Uncle Sam is selling to collectors bronze medals depicting Roy Wilkins, the civil rights leader who for 20 years led the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Each 1½-inch specimen—which features Wilkins and an allegorical figure of justice—duplicates a Congressional gold medal that President Reagan gave to Wilkins' widow in mid-January.

To order, send a check for \$2.25 per item to the United States Mint [Medals], P.O. Box 500, Philadelphia, Pa. 19105.

● Winning bidders paid about \$1.2 million at a Los Angeles auction late last month for 161 silver dollars dated between 1878 and 1935.

That total was slightly below some pre-sale estimates, but it still represented an average winning bid of about \$7,500 per coin. The hoard was perhaps the finest complete set of "Morgan" and "Peace" dollars ever assembled.

● As many as 40 dealers will be selling rare coins on March 1 at the 27th annual show of the Will County Coin Club. Hours are 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the American Legion Harwood Post near the intersection of Int. Hwy. 80 and Larkin Avenue in Joliet. Club members will conduct an auction beginning at 5 p.m.; admission is free to the show and auction.